

Ruler and Palace in Teotihuacán: An Iconographic Analysis

Gobernante y palacio en Teotihuacán: un análisis iconográfico

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Lines of research Gods and lords in the iconography of Teotihuacán.

Líneas de investigación Dioses y señores en la iconografía de Teotihuacán.

Most relevant publication “The Butterfly Bird God and his myth at Teotihuacán”, *Ancient Meso-america* 25, no. 1 (2014): 29-48.

Abstract This article addresses linked topics which have been debated intensely in the specialized literature: it proposes to identify the rulers of Teotihuacán, and their palace, through iconographic analysis of images worked in different materials. I present new arguments in favor of my proposal that the figures wearing the Great Tasseled Headdress fulfilled the role of rulers of the city. I also analyze a set of images on ceramics which indicate that their palace, with martial attributes, was a triad of pyramids, probably also including a monumental ceremonial platform. I propose that a possible candidate for the seat of government of Teotihuacán is the archaeological triad of the Plaza of the Columns.

Keywords lords with Great Tasseled Headdress; ruler; triad of pyramids; palace.

Resumen Mi artículo trata temas vinculados y muy debatidos por la literatura especializada: propone identificar a los gobernantes de Teotihuacán, así como su respectivo palacio, mediante el análisis iconográfico de imágenes plasmadas en distintos soportes materiales. Presento nuevos argumentos en favor de mi planteamiento acerca de que los Señores con Gran Tocado de Borlas cumplían el papel de los gobernantes de la ciudad. Después, analizo un conjunto de imágenes cerámicas que indican que su palacio, provisto de atributos marciales, habría correspondido a una tríada de pirámides, incluyendo probablemente además una

plataforma ceremonial monumental. Finalmente, la tríada arqueológica de la Plaza de las Columnas como una candidata posible de haber sido la sede de gobierno de Teotihuacán.

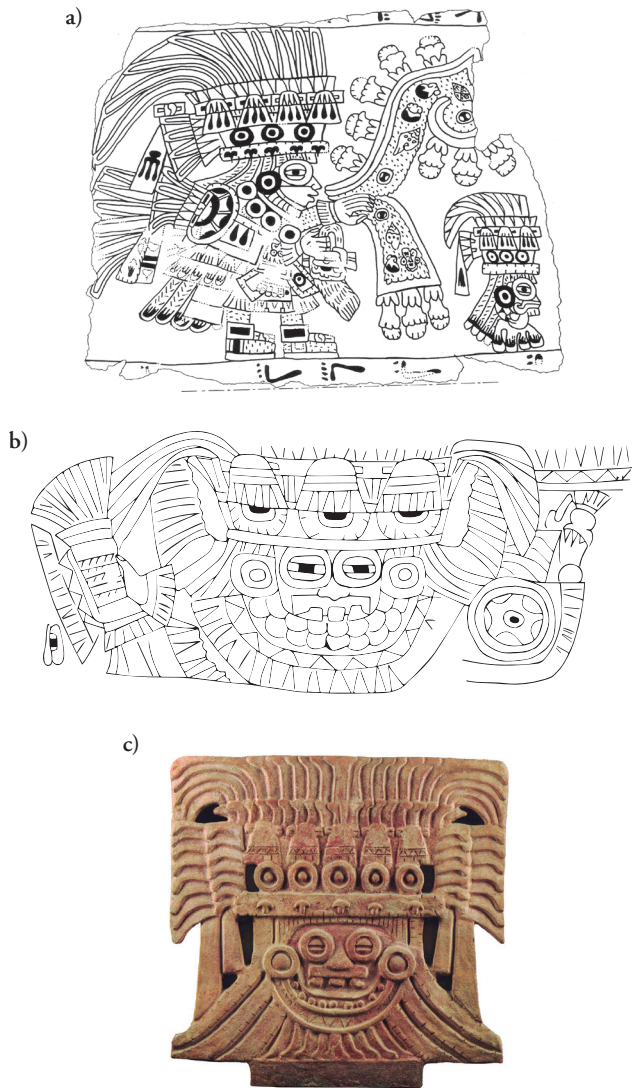
Palabras clave señores con Gran Tocado de Borlas; gobernante; tríada de pirámides; palacio.

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Ruler and Palace in Teotihuacán: *An Iconographic Analysis*

Attempting to identify the ruler of Teotihuacán—the hegemonic state of Mesoamerica in the Early Classic period (200-600 AD)—and his palace, are two sides of the same coin. In this article I shall first try to detect images that represent rulers; this will be the starting point from which to identify the images in which their palace is represented, and thence, finally, deduce the physical space that this palace would have occupied in the civic-ceremonial center of the city of Teotihuacán. Who held power in the state of Teotihuacán? Neither archaeologists nor authors of iconographical studies have reached a consensus. Archaeologists, in the absence of discoveries of royal tombs or other direct evidence of the existence of rulers, have only been able to present general proposals as to the character of the Teotihuacán State. They have proposed the existence of either a monarchy or, in contrast, of a collective government (see the review of the history of this investigation in Carballo 2020, 59-63).

Various proposals have emerged from iconographical studies that claim to identify images of the figure of the ruler. On the one hand, it has been proposed that the four personages depicted on the famed Las Colinas vessel might be the co-rulers of Teotihuacán who would be located according to the intercardinal directions (Manzanilla 2001, 2008, 2019). On the other, it has been suggested that an image in a mural in the Atetelco residential compound might represent a Teotihuacán ruler wearing the attributes of the goddess known from the murals of the residential compounds of Tepantitla and Tetitla, also in Teotihuacán (Headrick 2007). More recently, Nielsen and Helmke (2020) have argued that



1. Images of rulers with Great Tasseled Headdress: a) with war apparel, figure making an offering in a mural at Techinantitla; to his right is his name glyph in the form of the head of the Rain God with Great Tasseled Headdress (C. Millon 1988a: Figure V.1); b) wearing nose pendant with supernatural teeth on a Teotihuacán vessel, holding a bundle with feathers and shield, from behind which emerges the distal end of a throwing spear and another bundle with flames (Conides 2018: Figure 6.33b); c) with eyes closed on an almena (Robb 2017, 6).

a headdress at Teotihuacán with a motif known as the “year-sign” was worn by the rulers. In a previous work (Paulinyi 2001), I have taken as a starting point the investigations of Clara Millon (1973, 1988), who in her final interpretation considers the lords wearing a complex tasseled headdress as high-ranking military commanders. However, I proposed that these lords actually might have functioned under the aegis of the Rain God as rulers (Figures 1a, b, c). Considering the complexity of this headdress, in the present work I call them *lords with a Great Tasseled Headdress*.

Turning to the search for the physical space which was the site of the palace of Teotihuacán and seat of political power, the first candidate proposed by investigators was the Ciudadela (Armillas 1964, 307; R. Millon 1976, 236-238). Later, Cowgill (1983) proposed that the seat of power had been moved from the Ciudadela to the Avenue of the Dead Complex, leaving the Ciudadela as the symbolic palace. Subsequently, the same author suggested that it was more likely that the rulers of the Ciudadela had coexisted with the lower-ranking elite of the Avenue of the Dead Complex (Cowgill 2015, 108-115). The Xalla Complex has also been suggested as a candidate (Manzanilla 2001, 2019; Manzanilla and López Luján 2001; Manzanilla et al. 2005). Sugiyama has questioned the validity of all these proposals (Sugiyama 1993, 2004), while other researchers have proposed that they were all valid in a different chronological order: Xalla - Ciudadela - Avenue of the Dead Complex (Sanders and Evans 2006).

The rulers of Teotihuacán

I return to my proposal that the rulers of Teotihuacán were the lords with Great Tasseled Headdress (Paulinyi 2001), but will now present a battery of arguments which allow us to draw a new portrait of them.

1. Among the arguments, we must first establish the corpus of images of lords with Great Tasseled Headdress. It is necessary to distinguish between images of these lords and those images of the Rain God who wear a version of the Great Tasseled Headdress. If we review such representations of the Rain God in Teotihuacán art (Figures 2a, b, c; Covarrubias 1957: Figure 22; Kidder et al. 1946: Figure 2006h; Linné 1934: Figure 21; Séjourné 1966a: Plate XCII; von Winning 1947: Figure 1; 1987, I, ch. VII, Figure 11c, d; ch. XII, Figure 2a), we find that the representations of teeth and lips are supernatural and non-anthropomorphic (in effect, this is true of all the images of the Rain God). In contrast, the lords

with Great Tasseled Headdress, like any other mortals, have anthropomorphic lips and teeth. Furthermore, if we review all the images of the Rain God, we observe that the nose pendant never figures among their attributes; whereas representations of our lords, and of mortals in general, sometimes show them with nose pendants which may or may not cover their mouths (see Figures 1a, b, c, and the rest of the images listed in Point 2). The corpus of said lords is detailed in the following point.

2. In my first approach to this subject, I did not consider the numerical proportion between the images of the lords with Great Tasseled Headdress and those of other members of the elite. I have therefore undertaken this analysis here, based on the specialist literature accumulated over a century; and although the method is approximate, it is useful for distinguishing in broad terms the difference in importance observed between the different members of the elite. It is remarkable that these lords—or their headdresses—are represented much more frequently than any other member of the elite: I have detected more than 35 such images, while there are no more than about 10 of other lords. This marked difference identifies our lords as the most important figures of the Teotihuacán elite, that is, their rulers. Lords with Great Tasseled Headdress appear in four murals (or groups of murals) in the residential compounds of Tepantitla, Techinantitla (upper and lower murals) and Tetitla (Miller 1973: Figures 193-194; C. Millon 1988a: Figures V.1- V.8, V.10; Séjourné 1966a: Figure 15); and in a series of ceramic vessels (Berrin and Pasztory 1993: Nos. 98, 140; Conides 2018: Plate 18, Figure 6.35; Conides and Barbour 2002: Figures 6, 7; Glanz and Untergang 1986: No. 116; Gómez Chávez 2017; Langley 2010: photo by courtesy; Linné 1942: Figure 128; Manzanilla 2003, 51, below; Seler 1915: Figure 169; Séjourné 1959: Figures 138, 157; 1966b: Figure 87; von Winning 1987: II, ch. X, Figure 2c; and probably Evans 2010: Plate 8). We can also see them in four types of molded figurines and other ceramic objects (Bushnel 1965: Figure 35; García Chávez 2002: photo 3; Robb 2017, Nos. 5 and 6; Séjourné 1966b: Figure 147; 1966c: Figure 99; von Winning 1977: Figure 22b). We shall see that outside Teotihuacán they are represented on Stelae 31 and 32 (and perhaps 18) at Tikal, on Stela 11 at Yaxhá, and on portable objects from Escuintla and Kaminaljuyú (Hellmuth 1978: fig. 5; 1993: unnumbered tripod; Kidder et al. 1946: Figures 175a, 206d). If we include the images of the lords with less complex tasseled headdresses, who were probably lower-ranking members of an elite group directed by the lords with Great Tasseled Headdress (Paulinyi 2001, 24-26), the number of images recorded is over 40, including 6 murals at Teotihuacán and 7 stelae outside Teotihuacán. These



2. The Rain God with Great Tasseled Headdress: a) with jaguar's claws (Covarrubias 1957: Figure 22, detail); b) with jaguar's nose (highlighted in white), Teotihuacán Room of the Mexican National Museum of Anthropology (photo by author); c) emerging from a wide-mouthed container and scattering raindrops on an *almena* (photo courtesy of Rubén Cabrera Castro).

lower-ranking lords or their headdresses can be seen in the murals of Platform 14 of Zone 3, and in Tetitla at Teotihuacán (de la Fuente 2006[1995]a, 7-92, Figures 8.2-8.5; 2006[1995]b: Plates 75-77); on vessels from Tikal (C. Millon 1988a: Figure V. 19) and Kaminaljuyú (Kidder et al. 1946: Figure 207a); and on reliefs at Monte Albán (Stelae 7 and 8, and the Lápida Bazán).

3. There are other personages forming part of the elite who wear head-dresses with various characteristics; representations of several figures appear relatively frequently. There are around 10 representations of each of these head-dresses. Each of these figures may be observed indifferently with: Serpent Headdress¹, Butterfly Bird God Headdress² (see Paulinyi 2014, 2022), Jaguar Headdress³, “Balloon” Headdress⁴, Feathered Headdress⁵ (on the head of a figure whose torso is decorated with a bird bearing a martial insignia), and simple Segmented Headdress (or Helmet) (Figures 3a-f).⁶ In contrast to this simple form, more complex Segmented Headdresses also exist including a facial element, with or without zoomorphic ears (e.g. Berrin and Pasztory 1993: Figure 96, and Face C of Stela 31 at Tikal).

There are many more lords with other headdresses that only appear sporadically. The lord with the attributes of the goddess of Tepantitla, who according to

1. Headdresses of this type appear in two groups of murals, in Tlacuilapaxco and Tepantitla (Miller 1973: Figures 168-184; C. Millon 1988b); the headdress on the back of the Feathered Serpent of the pyramid of the same name; on small objects (Nielsen 2006: Figure 6; Séjourné 1959: Figure 131; 1966b, Figure 94; Sugiyama 1992: Figure 14; Teotihuacán 2009: Nos. 46, 62; von Winning 1969, 180). Finally, we can cite two types of figurines: one standing (Scott 2001, Plate 86a), the other seated on a throne (in the Teotihuacán room of the Mexican National Museum of Anthropology, personal observation). It is probably the Lightning Serpent (Paulinyi 2025).

2. The Butterfly Bird God Headdress is observed on the heads of figurines and on vessels (Berrin and Pasztory 1993: Nos. 61, 142; Conides 2018: cover; Kidder 1946: Figure 174d; Teotihuacán 2009: No. 31a; von Winning 1947: Figure 8; 1987, II: ch. II Figure 23a), and in a mural at Xelhá (Miller and Taube 1993, 49; Ruiz Gallut 2001: Figure 9).

3. The Jaguar Headdress appears in a group of murals in Zacuala (Miller 1973: Figures 204-205), and in another in Teopancaxco (Cabrera 2006 [1995]a: Figure 16.1, Plate 1) as well as in a vessel (Berrin and Pasztory 1993: No. 138), four types of figurines (Séjourné 1959: Figures 69c, 84b; 1962, Figure 99; 1966c: Figure 79), and on Stelae 4 and 31 at Tikal (side B).

4. The “Balloon” Headdress appears in a mural at Teopancaxco (Rubén Cabrera 2006 [1995] a, Plate 3), on various types of figurines (Ball 1974: 8; Berrin and Pasztory 1993: Nos. 98, 99; Teotihuacán 2009: Nos. 200a-b; Figure 6), and on Stela 5 at Uaxactún.

5. This Feathered Headdress appears on Teotihuacán vessels (Caso 1966: Figure 39; Conides 2018, Figure 6. 29a-b; Linné 1934: Figure 26a; Séjourné 1966b: Figure 37), and on vessels from Escuintla (Hellmuth 1975: Plates 4 and 5).

6. About the simple Segmented Headdress, in the Las Colinas vessel (Linné 1942: Figure 128), three elite figures wear the same type of headdress. See also: Hellmuth 1975, Plates 3, 6; 1987, Figure 14; Kidder et al. 1946: Figure 204a; Paulinyi 2001: Figure 19; Rattray 2001: Figure 122; Séjourné 1966c: Figure 90; Teotihuacán 2009: Figures 32, 275; von Winning 1987, vol. I, ch. VII: Figures 4. a - b, j).



a)



b)



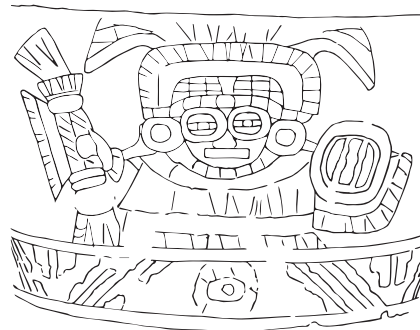
c)



d)



e)



f)

3. Members of the elite who appear relatively frequently in Teotihuacán art: a) figure making an offering with Serpent Headdress (Miller 1973: Figure 173 [detail]); b) with Butterfly Bird God Headdress (Kidder et al. 1946: Figure 174 d [detail]); c) with Feathered Headdress (Berrin-Pasztory 1993, no. 134); d) with Jaguar Headdress (Séjourné 1962, 130); e) with “Balloon” Headdress (Berrin-Pasztory 1993, No. 98, right); f) with simple Segmented Headdress (Paulinyi 2001: Figure 19). Figures in b-e hold a bundle with feathers and shield.

Headrick (2007) would be the ruler of Teotihuacán, appears in two representations, both in the Atetelco murals—or three if we include the bearers of offerings (male or female) to the goddess in Tepantitla. As I explain below, a more precise characterization can be obtained from the wider and more thematically varied set of images of lords with Great Tasseled Headdress. In contrast, characterization is more difficult and less clear for the other lords with fewer and less varied representations.

4. The predominance of the lords with Great Tasseled Headdress over other members of the elite can be seen in the famous Las Colinas vessel (Figure 4). In this vessel, the Lord with Great Tasseled Headdress leads a procession of three high-ranking figures wearing a simple Segmented Headdress, and accompanied by three different animals: serpent, bird and coyote. The leading lord differs from the three others in that he wears his distinctive headdress; and furthermore, on the front of his body appears the same headdress. We therefore detect that this headdress is indicative of a higher rank in the hierarchy than the simple Segmented Headdress. Below, we shall see that Stela 31 at Tikal also shows the superiority of the Great Tasseled Headdress over the Segmented Headdress with facial element and over the Jaguar Headdress.

5. The privileged relationship between the Rain God and the lords with Great Tasseled Headdress seems to be that between the probable tutelary god of Teotihuacán and its rulers. In a sense, the lords were representatives of the god. We have seen that the headdress of the lords with Great Tasseled Headdress is a version of the headdress of the god, and furthermore, this lord has the god's characteristic eye-rings. When the Rain God wears the Great Tasseled Headdress, he may also display a feline nose or claws (Figures 2a, b, c); we should therefore consider this to be the god's jaguar facet. It is therefore not surprising that the jaguar is also part of the iconography of these lords (Paulinyi 2001, 6-7). In the martial field, our lords also present a close relationship with the god; the lower border of the Great Tasseled Headdress frequently bears a row of spear-points (Figures 1a, c). A particular manifestation of the military facet of the lords with Great Tasseled Headdress is shown in a mural at Tepantitla. In this representation, the bust of the Lord is accompanied by weapons, while flames burst from his apparel. At the time, I proposed that the people of Teotihuacán believed that these lords contained the lightning of the Rain God in their bodies, giving them supernatural powers (Paulinyi 2001, 14-23). Today I adopt a more cautious stance, considering that idea as just one of the possible options for the interpretation of the lords with Great Tasseled Headdress.



4. Las Colinas vessel (Linné 1942: Figure 128). The ruler and three high-ranking figures wearing simple Segmented Headdresses, each with a different insignia or glyph, taking part in a procession of elite figures making offerings.

6. The martial theme is the most frequent in representations of the lords with Great Tasseled Headdress and they are the most frequent representatives of the military theme. If the lords with Great Tasseled Headdress are, as I propose, the heads of the Teotihuacán State, their martial profile offers strong support for the idea, because it is presumable that the hegemonic character of Teotihuacán implied expansion led by active rulers in the military field. In my first study on the subject, I did not appreciate its real importance, focusing on the sacred aspect of their military profile (Paulinyi 2001, 14-24). Lords with Great Tasseled Headdress can be seen wearing different types of military insignias (Séjourné 1966b: Figure 87; Conides 2018: Plate 18; Conides and Barbour 2002: Figure 7; Hellmuth 1978: Figure 5; Jarquín Pacheco 2002: Figure 95; Kidder et al. 1946: Figure 206d; Langley 2010: photo by courtesy; Seler 1915: Figures 166a-b). They also appear dressed as warriors (Figure 1a; see also Miller 1973: Figures 93-94; C. Millon 1988a: Figure V.1-10; Séjourné 1966a: Figure 15; Stela 11 of Yaxhá [Figure 5a]), and holding a bundle with feathers and a shield accompanied by

throwing-spears (Figure 1b; Conides 2018: Figure 6.35; also, Berrin and Pasztory 1993: No. 140; Hellmuth 1978: Figure 5). It is therefore not coincidental that C. Millon (1973, 1988a), supported by Langley (1986: 82-84), interpreted these lords as military commanders. In contrast there are only a few representations in which lords with Great Tasseled Headdress are seen bearing offerings, the cult act *par excellence* in Teotihuacán art (Figure 1a, C. Millon 1988a, 115-124; Figure 4).

7. The superior rank of the lords with Great Tasseled Headdress in front of the rest of the members of the elite is also reflected in the fact that they alone appear accompanied by their name glyph in Teotihuacán murals (specifically in the Techinantitla residential compound), in contrast to the general anonymity of other figures of the Teotihuacán elite (see for example Figure 1a; C. Millon 1988a: Figures V.1-V.8, V.10). I should stress here that some of the lower-ranking lords with Tasseled headdress (or sometimes just a headdress) appear with name glyphs in Stelae 7 and 8 (and possibly on the Lápida Bazán) at Monte Albán (Paulinyi 2001, 25).

Was there one lord with Great Tasseled Headdress? Or several at the same time, acting as co-rulers? The murals at Techinantitla show various figures of lords with Great Tasseled Headdress in procession with name glyphs; these may represent a diachronic sequence of rulers or synchronic co-rulers (R. Millon 1988). I have argued in favor of the second possibility (Paulinyi 2001, 23-24). In Teotihuacán, lords with lower-rank tasseled headdresses also appear in procession, although without glyphs; they are synchronous (Kidder et al. 1946: Figure 207a; de la Fuente 2006[1995] a, 87-92). There is another representation that also favors the synchronic character of the Techinantitla murals: in Stela 7 of Monte Albán (Marcus 1983: Figure 6) we observe a Teotihuacán embassy of lords with tasseled headdresses of lesser complexity in procession and with their name glyphs, where the possibility of a diachronic composition is excluded. The lower-ranking members of the elite sometimes also appear in procession or group: in the Las Colinas vessel we see three lords wearing simple Segmented Headdress (Figure 4); in the murals at Tepantitla we see the members of a procession with Serpent Headdress (Figure 3a); and in the murals at Teopancaxco two figures appear in the same scene wearing the Jaguar Headdress (Cabrera Castro 2006[1995] a: Plate 1). Among them, the Las Colinas vessel is the most important from the point of view of my hypothesis, because each of the characters represented in it—clearly participants in a synchronous procession—carry a distinctive glyph or symbol, as occurs with the lords of Techinantitla.

8. I conclude my argument by saying that images of lords with Great Tasseled Headdress have been recorded far beyond the frontiers of the Valley of Mexico;

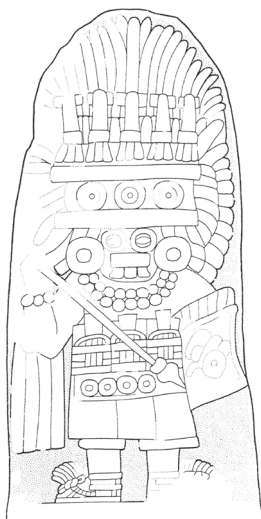
as we shall see, the most notable examples are found on four stelae at Petén, Guatemala (Nos. 31 and 32 at Tikal [Figures 5b, c, d] and No. 11 at Yaxhá [Figure 5a], and probably on Stela 18 at Tikal, severely damaged), apart from others observed in the portable art of Kaminaljuyú and Escuintla (Hellmuth 1978: Figure 5 1993; Kidder et al. 1946: Figures 175a, 206d). This suggests the exceptional importance of the lords with Great Tasseled Headdress, not only in Teotihuacán but also in remote Maya states, at least after Teotihuacán expansion reached Tikal in 378 AD, probably alluding to the quality of ruler of these lords.

Images of Teotihuacán rulers on Stelae 31 and 32 at Tikal and 11 at Yaxhá

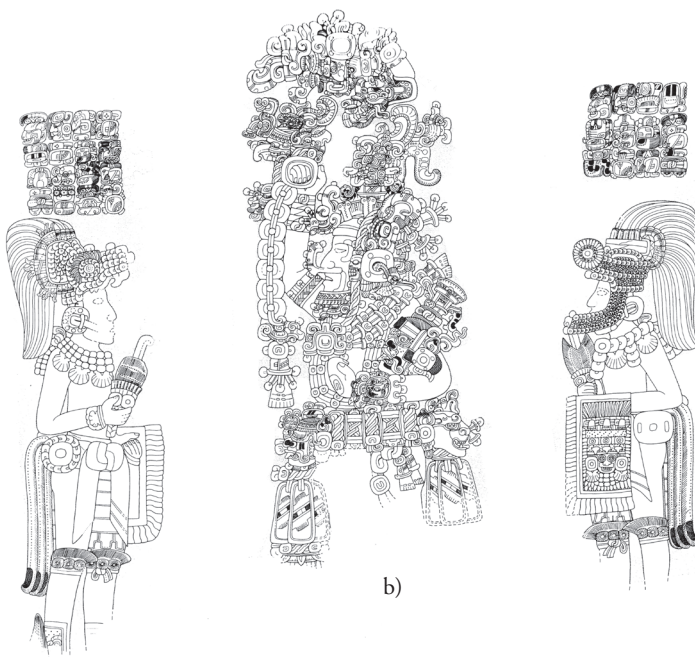
Relying on the arguments so far presented, from here on I will use the term “rulers” to indicate the lords with Great Tasseled Headdress in the rest of this discussion.

First, we will focus on Tikal to examine the images carved on Stelae 31 and 32, which according to my analysis are figures with Great Tasseled Headdress (see Figures 5b, c, d). From the start of investigation, the idea has been widely accepted that they represent the Teotihuacán Tlaloc (Coe 1962: 499-500) (in current terms the Rain God or Storm God); it has also been proposed that they show a martial Teotihuacán god (Pasztory 1974, 13-15). Later, C. Millon (1988a: 127-128)—who initially shared the idea of Tlaloc—presented plausible arguments that the same figure appears in both stelae: a Teotihuacán mortal of great importance, wearing a tasseled headdress. Subsequently, other authors adopted the idea that the image on Stela 32 represented a high-ranking Teotihuacán figure or warrior with tasseled headdress (see Martin and Grube 2008; Stuart 2002[2000]). Finally, Stuart (2024:55, 99) recently proposed that the aforementioned characters on Stelae 31 and 32 represent Spear-Thrower Owl, ruler of Teotihuacán.

Considering how little was known about Teotihuacán iconography when these stelae were discovered, the interpretation of the images as representations of the Teotihuacán Tlaloc was reasonable at that time. I think that now the question should be asked at a higher level: Do the images carved on the stelae represent the lords with Great Tasseled Headdress—rulers—of Teotihuacán, or the Rain God wearing a Great Tasseled Headdress? If we compare the representations on these two stelae with images of Teotihuacán art, we come to the conclusion that the figures on the stelae, and those on Stela 11 at Yaxhá, rep-

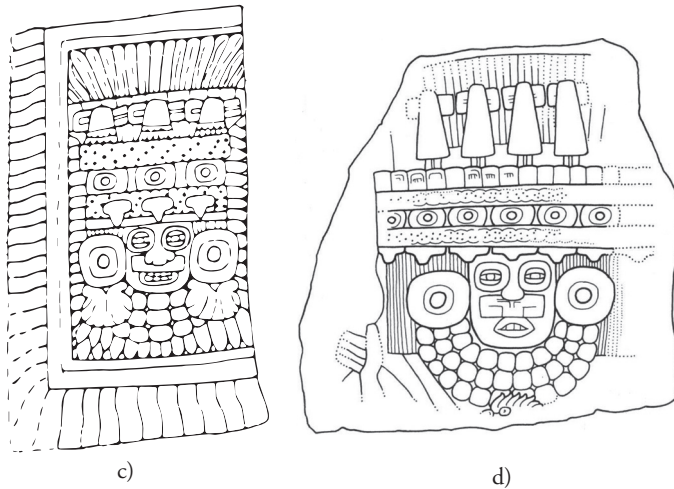


a)



b)

5. Images of Teotihuacán rulers in Yaxhá and Tikal: a) on Stela 11 in Yaxhá (Grube 2000: Figure 199); b) on Stela in Tikal (Jones and Satterthwaite 1982: Figure 52).



c) The shield of the ruler Yax Nun Ahin on Stela in Tikal, detail; d) on Stela in Tikal (Jones and Satterthwaite 1982: Figure 35).

resent rulers of Teotihuacán. This proposal is based on the fact that our advances in knowledge of Teotihuacán iconography now allow us to establish differences between these two figures, as noted above in Point 1.

Stelae 31 and 32 at Tikal, and 11 at Yaxhá, do not represent the Rain God, but the ruler or rulers of Teotihuacán, since they do not have the characteristic supernatural mouth and teeth of the Rain God, but a human mouth and teeth; they also have the rectangular nose pendant or the rectangular nose pendant with supernatural teeth (in the case of Stela 11 at Yaxhá), which is not an attribute of this god (compare Figure 1 with Figure 2). As we have seen, both types of nose pendant are worn by rulers in Teotihuacán (see Figures 2b and 5c, d). Furthermore, the figures carved on the three stelae cited wear a row of spear-points on their headdresses, an attribute not normally worn by the Rain God in Teotihuacán art; it is only recorded in association with the rulers, as mentioned above (Berrin and Pasztory 1993: No. 140; Conides 2018: Plate 18; Paulinyi 2001: Figure 1).

This is the basis for my proposal that on Stela 31, the ruler of Tikal, Yax Nun Ahin, bears a shield with a frontal representation of the face of a ruler of Teotihuacán (Figure 5b, c). According to the testimony of the glyph texts on this stela, and on the Tikal Marker stone, his father was Spear-Thrower Owl, ruler of

a place called—according to David Stuart and Stephen Houston (2018)—Five Mountains of Cotton. Stuart proposed that Spear-Thrower Owl was a ruler of Teotihuacán (Stuart 2002[2000: 481-490; 2024]. Stuart and Houston (2018) think that Five Mountains of Cotton means Five Snow-capped Mountains and that this toponym could refer to the wider region of Teotihuacán, the Central Plateau, where a number of snow-capped peaks raise their heads. In view of all the above, I propose that the Teotihuacán ruler portrayed on Yax Nun Ahin's shield is his father, Spear-Thrower Owl, whose name appears in the text above the figure of Yax Nun Ahin. My proposal supports Stuart (2004:55, 99), who approaches the problem in another way, suggesting that the character represented on Stela 32 could be Spear-Thrower Owl due to the bird he carries on his chest and, by extension, that the character portrayed on the shield of Stela 31 would also be Spear-Thrower Owl.

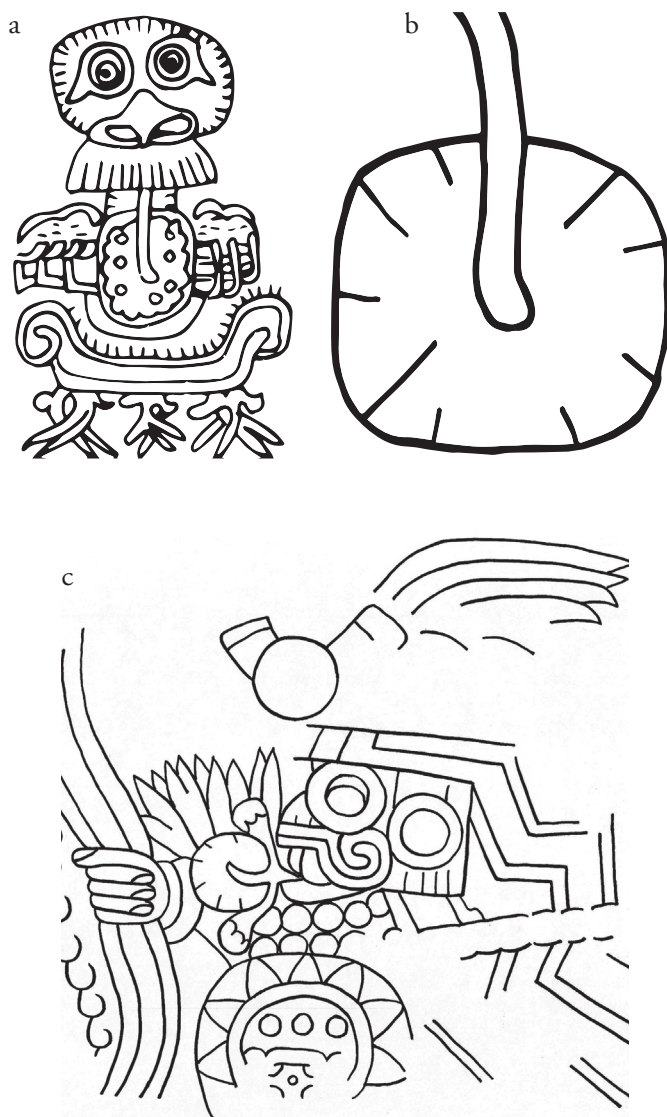
If I am right, and the images on Stela 31 show the father, Spear-Thrower Owl (who exercised supreme power over Tikal) and his son, Yax Nun Ahin, then a hierarchical difference may also be indicated by their headdresses, showing the supremacy of the father's Great Tasseled Headdress over headdresses of the Teotihuacán type worn by the son (Yax Nun Ahin) in Stelae 31. What we see is a Teotihuacán type of Jaguar Headdress, a shell-platelet one worn by the figure on side B of Stela 31. The figure on side C of Stela 31 wears a Segmented Headdress with facial element. The differences observed in the use of headdresses support my proposal that in Teotihuacán the Great Tasseled Headdress and its wearer were of higher rank than the other representatives of the Teotihuacán elite and their headdresses.

A proposal has also been offered for the identification in Teotihuacán art of the name Spear-Thrower Owl. Nielsen and Helmke (2008) propose that the symbolic frontal bird with open wings on one of the murals of Atetelco indicates Spear-Thrower Owl (Nielsen and Helmke 2008, 461-465). According to this interpretation, the head is that of an owl, and a vertical motif with slightly curved tip that appears below it is a spear-thrower. Placed together they correspond to the reading of the name Spear-Thrower Owl (Figure 6a). However, although Cabrera Castro (2002, 156-158) calls it a barn owl, neither he nor Nielsen and Helmke have offered arguments to show that it really is specifically an owl. The identification of the different species of birds in Teotihuacán art is not an easy task (see Pasztory 1988a). For example, another bird that appears in the murals of Tetitla presents a frontal head similar to that of the Atetelco bird (Miller 1973: Figures 281-283); in this case, its species has been discussed, with different au-

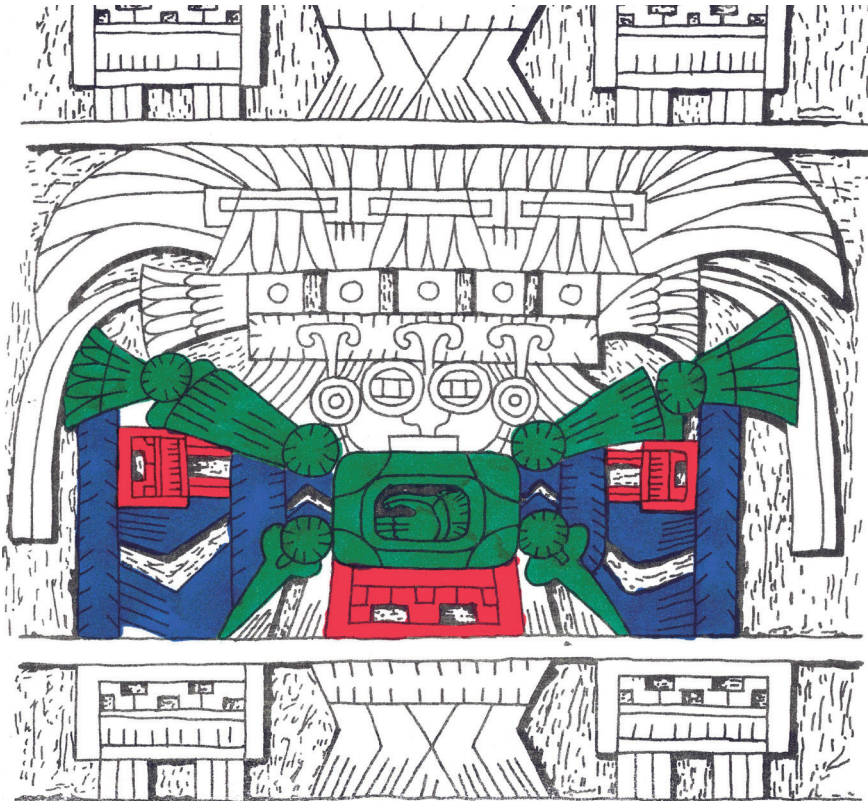
thors suggesting a quetzal (Séjourné 1966a, 283-300), an owl (Miller 1973, 138), or an eagle (Navarizo Ornelas 2006[1995], 328-329). The motif that Nielsen and Helmke suggest to be a spear-thrower is the characteristic long, slightly curved stem in the center of a round water lily leaf (Figure 6b). As this figure shows, the leaf of the plant covers the bird's body. The water lily is known to be associated with the Rain God in many images in Teotihuacán art, in versions which vary slightly (Figure 6c). In a mural at Tetitla, a water lily leaf—almost identical to the Atetelco leaf—appears out of the mouth of the god, consisting of an outer circle and a wavy inner circle (Miller 1973: Figure 291; Wrem and Helmke 2012, Figure 12b). As can be seen, the Atetelco bird is placed in a wide-mouthed vessel that represents the world of the waters, the underworld, a suitable context for a water lily. In short, the image of the Atetelco bird probably does not mean Spear-Thrower Owl.

*Previous studies on images of buildings linked
to the rulers of Teotihuacán*

The buildings associated with images of the figures that I define in this article as rulers of Teotihuacán have been discussed in the past by various authors, but no exhaustive analysis has been offered. The first to mention here is C. Millon (1988a, 124), who pointed out that a military figure—one of our rulers—and a martial insignia appear on a Teotihuacán vessel surrounded by three temples (Figure 7). Conides and Warren Barbour (Conides 2018, 89-93; Conides and Barbour 2002, 416-422) published two new images containing lords with Great Tasseled Headdress associated with buildings, noting that the link between these lords and the buildings was repeated on several occasions. Furthermore, they interpreted the three buildings remarked on by C. Millon as a triad of temples (set of three pyramids), of a type known in the monumental architecture of the first centuries of Teotihuacán. Conides and Barbour proposed that the lords mentioned here, together with some institution that they represented, were linked with the triads of temples (Conides 2018; Conides and Barbour 2002, 419). On this point, Conides and Barbour built on the opinion of R. Millon (1981) and Pasztory (1988b), according to whom the triads of temples functioned as administrative centers, or else represented important social units of the city. This idea has been maintained over time; more recently, Froese et al. (2014), following Manzanilla (1993), proposed that the triads constituted ward (*barrio*)



6. The Atetelco bird with water lily: a) water lily leaf on the bird's body (Cabrera Castro 2006 [1995]b: Figure 18, detail); b) water lily leaf on a vessel (Séjourné 1966b, Figure 114, detail, drawn by Tania Basterrica); c) water lily leaf and flower buds in the mouth of the Rain God, and band with zigzag ribbons hanging from his headdress (Taube 2011: Figure 5.20, drawn by Tania Basterrica).



7. Ruler with martial insignia, surrounded by a triad of temples (Séjourné 1966b, Figures 87), with highlighted elements: shield and crossed throwing spears (green); “objects F” (blue); the triad of temples (red).

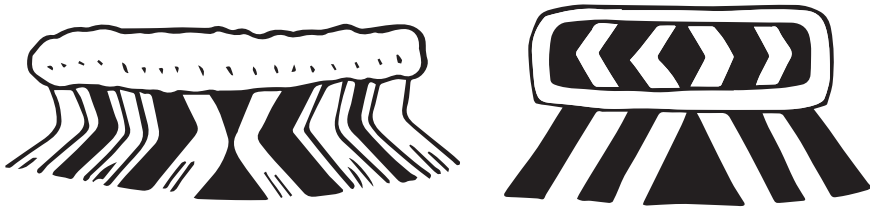
centers, while Cowgill (2015) postulated that a group of triads would have functioned as the seats of an early form of joint government in the Patlachique phase (100-1 BC). Another contribution to the investigation of these images of buildings is that of Claudia García Des-Lauriers (2008), who maintained that two of them represent an early version of the Aztec *tlacochcalco*, the “house of darts”, which served as an arsenal and also as a ritual space. At the same time, Nielsen and Helmke (2014) discovered a miniature model of the same temple in a representation of a headdress.

The search for the palace

We have six ceramic vessels which represent a triad of temples, one temple, or a platform (Conides 2018: Figures 4.4, 4.9; Conides and Barbour 2002: Figures 6 and 7; Nielsen and Helmke 2014: Figure 12b; Séjourné 1966b: Figure 8; 1966a: Figure 52). The most important image is shown here in Figure 7. There is a second vessel that has not been published; a photograph of this vessel shows a similar image, but the details are unclear and hard to identify (photo courtesy of James Langley). The vessel in Figure 7 shows the frontal head of a ruler with Great Tasseled Headdress, wearing a rectangular nose pendant placed above a particular Teotihuacán martial insignia. Teotihuacán martial insignias generally are worn by people and animals; in both cases they replace or cover the torso (Hellmuth 1993; Kidder et al. 1946: Figure 206d; Langley 1986, 65, table II, ref. 208; Seler 1915: Figure 166a-b).

The head of the ruler and his martial insignia is framed, as noted above, by a triad of temples with high, straw roofs and *almenas* or merlons. Immediately below the insignia we see the roof of the principal temple, which is inverted and larger than the two miniature lateral temples represented with a 90° turn. The nucleus of the martial insignia consists of a shield bearing the design of a hand, with two crossed throwing spears behind the shield. The shield is exceptional, because it has the shape of a quincross (see Langley 1986, 279); this element is one of the most important symbols of the Rain God and forms part of his insignia, among other appearances. From the sides of the shield, zigzag ribbons extend horizontally, crossing notched bands; these are probably a version of “object F”, in Langley’s terminology (Langley 1986: 65, 313). “Object F” and its twin “object E” (Figures 8a and b) are apparently variations of the same object (cf. Langley 1986, 313); below I will call them by the common name of band(s) with ribbons. In the upper and lower framing panels of the image in Figure 7 we see alternately abbreviated representations of the triad and of the martial insignia: a single temple to represent the triad of temples, and a band with ribbons (“object F”) to represent the ruler’s martial insignia. This clear appearance of “object F” in association with the temple supports the proposal that the zigzag ribbons with bands issuing from the shield really are examples of “object F”.

It should be noted that the military insignia which in figures 8 and 9 appears equally linked to the ruler and his temple, is different from the normal Teotihuacán military insignia; both types consist of a core with shield and hand, crossed by one or two thrown darts, but in the case of the normal insignia this



8. Ribbons with band: a) “object F”, and b) “object E” (Langley 1986, 313, ref. 225 and ref. 243).

core is carried by an owl (sometimes by another bird) (von Winning 1987: I, 88-89), and does not possess the bands with ribbons. Similar martial insignia in the form of bundles of weapons can also be observed in the Late Postclassic. In the Aztec codices they frequently appear accompanying conquests, and they also appear in Mexica sculpture (Pasztor 1983: plates 66, 130). They respond to combinations of the shield with other weapons (dart, dart thrower or sword). In the codices, its most notable representations are found in the Mendoza Codex (Berdan and Anawalt 1992) along with the conquests of the Mexica rulers (folios 2r, 2v, 3v, 4v, 5v, 7v, 10r, 12r, 13r, 15v).

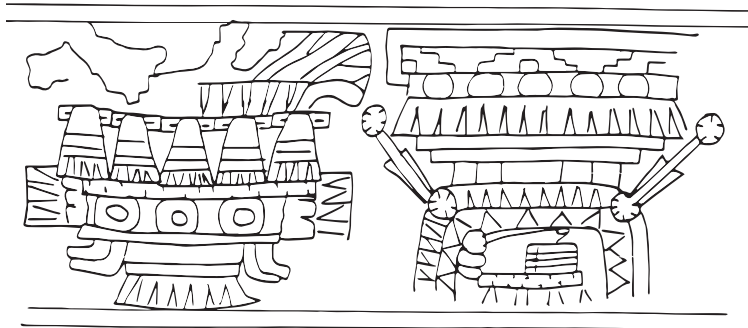
The Rain God frequently appears in images wearing a headdress composed in part of wavy or zigzag ribbons, and also a notched band (Figure 6c); this allows us to suppose that the shapes of both “object F” and “object E” (Figures 8a and b) derive from the headdress (Juárez Osnaya and Ávila Rivera 2006[1995]: Plates 13-17; Miller 1973: Figure 360; R. Millon 1988: Figure IV. 21a-b). The notched band is probably a simplified representation of the clouds represented with greater realism in Teotihuacán art as wavy-edged strips from which fall drops of rain (e.g., Linné 1934: Figure 21a-b; Miller 1973: Figure 360; Paulinyi 1997, 28-29). The wavy or zigzag ribbons that cross the band or issue from it seem to represent lightning, which appears in these two forms in Teotihuacán art (Paulinyi 1997). So the meaning of the ribbons and the band is probably the storm brought by the Rain God (Paulinyi 2001, 21-22). We should also note that the ruler’s headdress may have had a similar meaning, since it presents a notched strip or wavy border, from which hang points of throwing spears. The Rain God’s lightning or thunderbolt, represented as a wavy notched spear, is known to have been recorded once in Teotihuacán art (see Séjourné 1966a: Figure 160).

The images on two other vessels are less eloquent, but clearly represent the same building that we see in Figure 7, because they have the same attributes.

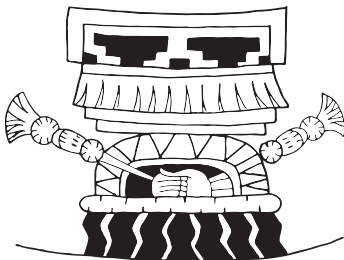
One image of them shows only the Great Tasseled Headdress of the rulers together with the temple; the roof is high and with *almenas*, and there is a door, all superimposed on the Ruler's martial insignia mentioned, with a diagrammatic version of the band with ribbons (Figure 9a). This image is an abbreviated version of what we observed in Figure 7. On another vessel, from which only the image on one of its faces has been published, we see the roof of a temple with *almenas*; below it, the martial insignia that we have already seen, with its band with ribbons (in this case "object F"), are clearly represented (Figure 9b). Consequently this is also an abbreviated representation of the same triad of temples with the martial insignia observed on the vessels described above. In the image on this vessel, the building alternates with a person, of whom we can see only the edge of his headdress and a plume of feathers (Séjourné 1966a: Figure 52). The person so portrayed could be the figure of a ruler, but as the current location of the vessel is unknown, and we have no information about its other face, this cannot be established with any certainty.

On the next vessel, the temple and the martial insignia appear in miniature, forming part of the headdress of a high-ranking person making an offering (Figure 9c). The person appears to be associated with the temple, inviting us to speculate on his identity: Is he a ruler, who on this occasion is not wearing his Great Tasseled Headdress but another headdress? Furthermore, in the strip below the figure we see a severed head with eyes closed and tongue sticking out, as well as obsidian blades and spear-throwers; the image as a whole alludes to warfare (Nielsen and Helmke 2014: Figure 12b).

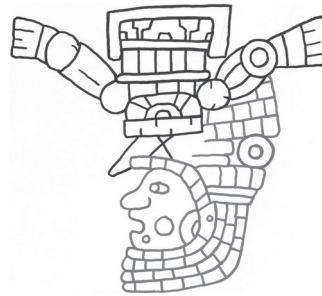
Who could our triad of temples belong to? I initially considered Figures 7 and 9b as representations of the temple of the Rain God (Paulinyi 2001, 22); however, the publication of new images of buildings associated with rulers, and my recent analyses, have led me to a different conclusion. I concluded that the Great Tasseled Headdress with points of the throwing spears, and the martial insignia with the band with ribbons, do not in fact form part of the Rain God's iconography, but are derived from it and are essential attributes of rulers. So the person to whom the triad of temples discussed above belongs is the ruler, and not the Rain God. Indeed, when the temple of the Rain God is represented (Figure 9d), the God appears alone with the building; in this figure, we see the Rain God wearing his version of the Great Tasseled Headdress, and portrayed with a jaguar's nose. In contrast, in the five images identified for the triad of temples associated with the rulers, we see their martial insignia below the roof, and no representation of the Rain God. The triad of temples of the rulers and the



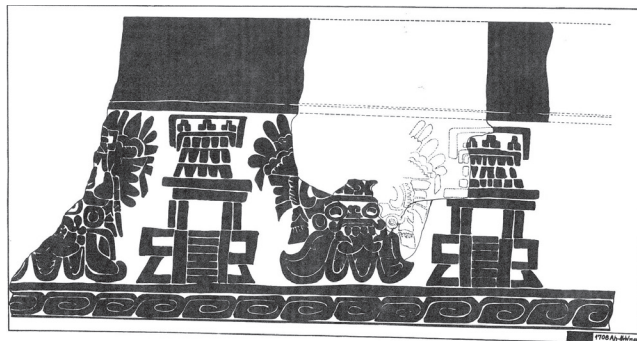
a)



b)



c)



d)

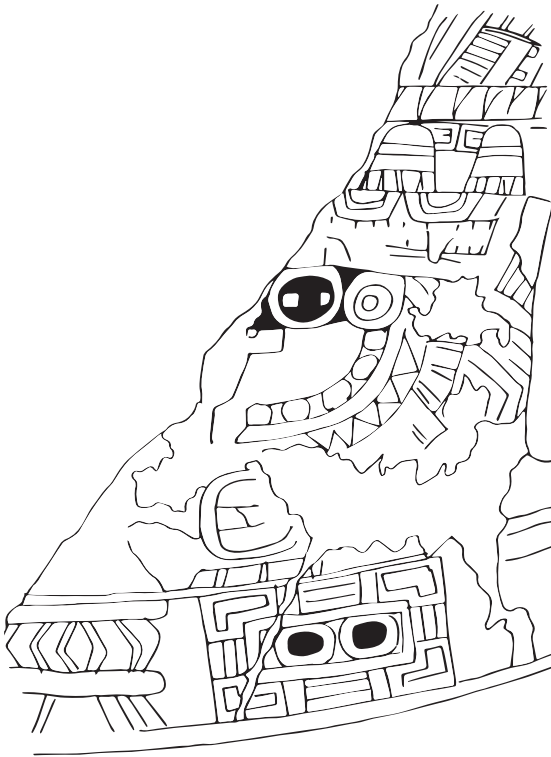
9. Triad of temples of the ruler in abbreviated representation: a) Great Tasseled Headdress beside temple with martial insignia (Conides and Barbour 2002: Figure 7); b) temple with martial insignia (drawn by the author based on Séjourné 1966a: Figure 52, detail); c) figure making offering, wearing miniature temple with martial insignia in his headdress (Nielsen and Helmke 2014: Figure 12b, detail drawn by Tania Basterrica); d) Rain God with Great Tasseled Headdress, together with a temple (von Winning 1947: Figure 1).

temple of the Rain God probably constituted two different architectural groups, despite the close relations between this god and the rulers.

So, if the triad of temples belonged to the ruler, what was its function? The key to the answer is the ruler's military insignia. The insignia is always closely intertwined with the entire temple or just its roof, linking the essence of the building with war and conquest. We saw that in the most important representation of the triad (Figure 7), the ruler is represented together with the insignia in the middle of the triad, between the three temples and under the roof of the principal one. He is therefore probably its owner, and, it may have been the seat from which he exercised power, his palace. The power of the ruler is manifested by his military insignia, which is consistent with the fact that the most frequent theme of their iconography is—as we have seen in detail above—warfare. In other words, this appears to be the palace of rulers with a strongly military profile: these rulers most probably directed the military campaigns that made the State of Teotihuacán the major power in Mesoamerica in the Early Classic. While the insignia speaks of military force in abstract, the lower strip on the vessel in Figure 9c, with representations of a throwing spear, severed head and obsidian knives, is a tangible evocation of war. In a different image the martial insignia (band with ribbons) is represented without any association. In this image, the shield has only one spear crossing behind it, and it rests on the wavy-bordered band with ribbons (Séjourné 1966a: Figure 157). This shield bears the symbols known as “semi-stars” (von Winning 1987: II, 9-10), which with their aquatic connotation evoke the quincross of the shield in Figure 7.

The ceremonial platform

There is an image which may help us to broaden our panorama of the possible appearance of the rulers' palace. In contrast to the representations of the triad of temples that we have seen so far, in the lower strip of this ceramic fragment (Figure 10) we see a different architectural structure, below the bust of a ruler, apparently holding a bundle (see Conides and Barbour 2002, 416). The representation shows a rectangular structure, with *tableros* and steps on all four sides; the strip has alternating images of this structure and bands with ribbons (version of “object E”, see Figure 8b). The structure is a ceremonial platform, like the two monumental platforms with four staircases excavated in the Ciudadela and the Plaza of the Moon (Conides 2018, 90; Conides and Barbour 2002). The



10. Ruler and ceremonial platform with four staircases, accompanied below by bands with ribbons ("object E") (Conides and Barbour 2002: Figure 6).

Atetelco murals also show a platform with four staircases and panels (see Cabrera 2006[1995]b, 210-211), but of a different shape.

The ceremonial platform on our ceramic fragment bears a pair of rings in the center. This pair of rings, which appears associated with different figures in Teotihuacán art, has frequently been compared with the eye-rings of the Rain God. We can say that the pair of rings that we see on this structure is associated with the ruler, because his images generally have rings round their eyes; in the case of a mural at Tepantitla he is portrayed wearing the same pair of rings on his torso, while he is armed and flames emerge from his body (Miller 1973: Figures 193-195). In a vessel from Tikal (C. Millon 1988a: Figure V.19), Teotihuacán lords are represented with less complex tasseled headdresses, accompanied by high-ranking warriors who present the same pair of rings on their foreheads. Likewise a vessel in provincial Teotihuacán style from Escuintla shows a ruler and a warrior,

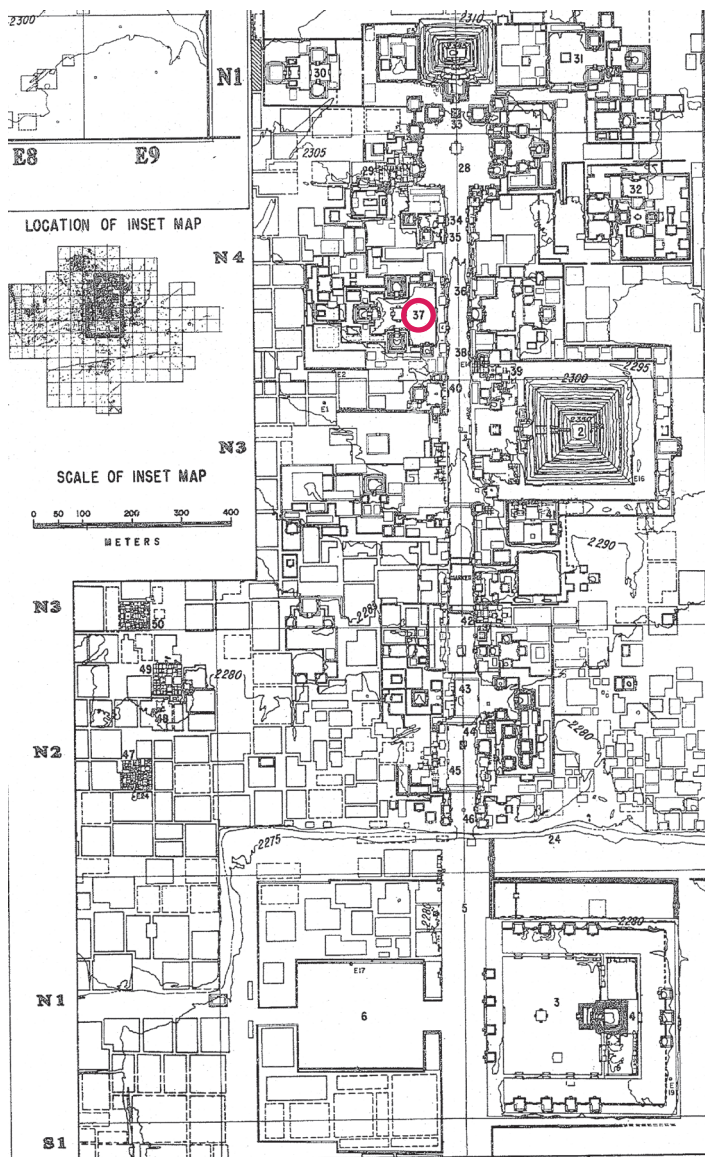
the latter with rings on his forehead (Hellmuth 1993). To summarize, it seems probable that the two rings on the platform in Figure 10 allude to the ruler (see also Conides 2018: 90).

The fact that bands with ribbons appear as the sole attribute in the abbreviated representation of the ruler's palace in the upper and lower strips in Figure 7 establishes a strong link between the palace and the ceremonial platform, which bears the same attribute. The bands with ribbons of the platform, like those in the abbreviated images of the palace, must be a simplified representation of the palace's martial insignia. The platform therefore probably also belonged to him, perhaps forming part of his palace which consisted of a triad of temples. The fact that the platform is represented with the ruler alone in Figure 10, with no other architectural element, suggests that the platform enjoyed great importance due to the ceremonial activities carried out there.

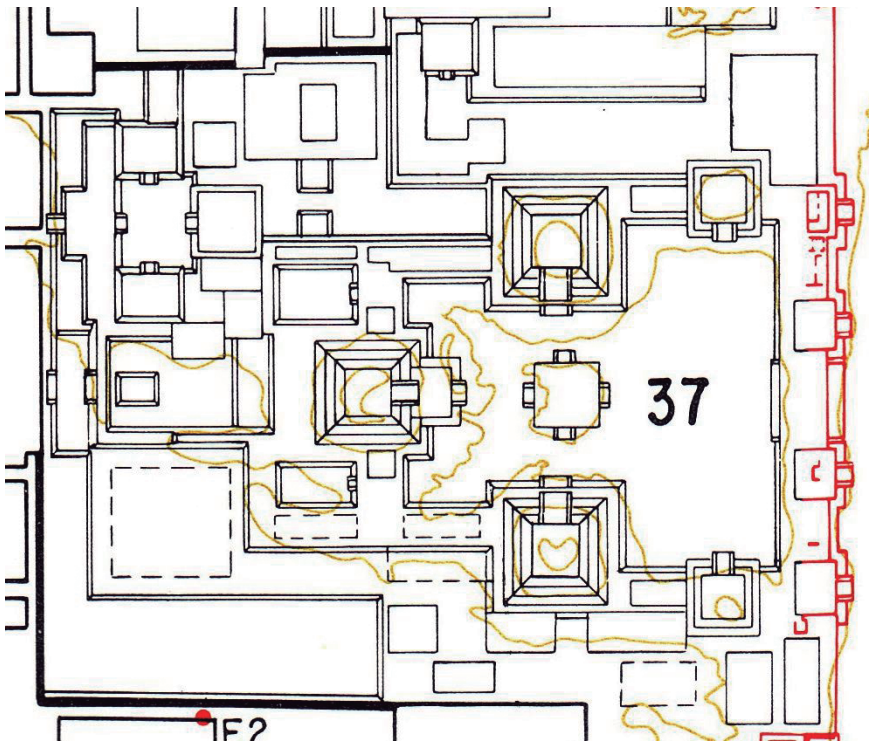
Epilogue: an archaeological triad

If my proposal is correct, the palace of the rulers of Teotihuacán consisted of a triad of temples and perhaps included an important ceremonial platform. Which of all the more than 20 triads known in the archaeological map of the city would have been the rulers' palace (Figure 11)? Regarding the nature of the triads, I consider—following the opinion of Cowgill (2015), Millon (1981), Manzanilla (1993) and Froese et al. (2014)—that these served in some sense as political-administrative centers. If this were the case, we must search among the existing triads for the one that is most notable, and for this reason, it could be a candidate to constitute the palace, which was the political headquarters *par excellence* of the city.

There is one triad which stands out from all the others from every perspective: this is the triad of the Plaza of the Columns Complex (below I shall refer to it simply as “the Triad”) (Figures 11 and 12). It is located in the heart of the civic-ceremonial center of the city, on the west side of the Avenue of the Dead opposite the north wing of the architectural compound of the Pyramid of the Sun. Excavations in the Triad began in 2015 as part of the Project Plaza of the Columns Complex (PPCC). (R. Millon et al. 1973, 30). As definitive PPCC publications have generally not been published (but see N. Sugiyama et al. 2016, 2020), I will consider only the map of R. Millon et al. (1973, 30). What are the characteristics of the Triad? It is the largest unit of its kind, larger than



11. The civic-ceremonial centre of Teotihuacán (Millon et al. 1973) and the location of the Triad of the Plaza of the Columns (N° 37 in the map).



12. The Triad of the Plaza of the Columns (R. Millon et al. 1973, 30).

any other triad in the city. It is the only one located among the largest architectural complexes of Teotihuacán, along with the Ciudadela, the pyramids of the Sun and the Moon, Xalla, and the Avenue of the Dead Complex. The height of this triad is also exceptional, because it is the fourth after the pyramids of the Sun, the Moon and the Feathered Serpent (Cowgill 2015, 117). Furthermore, the size of the plaza in which the triad stands is equally notable: it is the fourth biggest plaza in Teotihuacán—after the plazas of the Great Compound, the Ciudadela, and the pyramid of the Moon; it is bigger than the plaza of the Pyramid of the Sun.

It is also much more complex than the other triads. At the broadest part of the plaza a smaller pyramid stands on either side; this brings the number of pyramids in the group up to five, which is unique in Teotihuacán. The Triad was partially enclosed by monumental walls: according to the map, two long

walls formed its southwest corner, indicating its southern and western limits. To the north, two almost continuous east-west walls indicate the limit on that side. On the other hand, it is striking that the pyramids of the Triad frame a monumental ceremonial platform, now severely damaged, which in Millon et al. (1973, 30) is reconstructed hypothetically with four staircases. According to the map of the city, no other triad had a platform of similar size. Monumental platforms with four staircases are only found in the case of the ceremonial platforms of the Plaza of the Pyramid of the Moon, and inside the Ciudadela. Above we analyzed the image of a ceremonial platform, apparently of great importance and linked with the rulers (Figure 10). Considering all the exceptional features of the Triad, I propose that the triad of temples which appears on the vessels discussed above could be this Triad, and that this would have been the Palace of the Rulers of Teotihuacán. However, my review of the Triad is only a first and hypothetical step to establishing its identity: only the most recent archaeological excavation can offer definitive information on the matter in the future. ❀

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N.B. My thanks are due to Helena Horta for correcting the style of the original text.

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